

Sweet Potato Pie

Sweet Potato Pie is a premiere all female band that has been entertaining audiences for nearly two decades with their classy blend of Americana, Bluegrass, Country and Gospel music mixed together in a style they call “sweetgrass.” Radio and TV are well acquainted with their “angelic” vocals from appearances on PBS, the Food Network and worldwide radio broadcasts. Hailed as the “Lennon Sisters of Bluegrass”, their show revolves around their beautiful 3-part harmonies, hard driving instrumentals and down home humor and storytelling. With classic songs from Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Flatt and Scruggs and other legends mixed with their chart topping original songs, audiences are in for a sensational night of family entertainment. The Pie has 7 CD’s to their credit which includes the #1 Album on Bluegrass APD charts, #1 Classic Country Album on the APD Country Chart and #3 Album on the Holiday APD charts.

The group is sponsored in part by the NC Sweet Potato Growers. Their relationship with the agricultural industry provides them with unique opportunities to promote agriculture as they sing their way around the country. Their music was selected in 2015 for use in elementary classrooms to teach students about North Carolina’s agricultural crops. Sweet Potato Pie’s performance style and music is featured in various high school music curriculums in the state.

After seeing the band perform, Bill Wilson, Director, COMMA Auditorium, Morganton, NC wrote: “Sweet Potato Pie should be on the plate of about any performing arts series that wants to serve up the tastiest concert on its menu. This homegrown, all female band dishes out a fresh and bountiful variety of music that is sure to please the palates of all who are willing to take a bite. Their music is rich both in blue and new-grass, coupled with a spirited southern heart and good clean fun for the entire family.”

Band members include: **Sonya Stead**-guitar (Cary, NC), **Crystal Richardson** –banjo (Seagrove, NC), **Sandy Whitley** –bass (Albemarle, NC), and **Tori Jones** – fiddle (Lexington, NC)

Sonya Stead (guitar) is a co- founder of Sweet Potato Pie and last original band member. In 2000, she and two other women began playing and creating a musical style that drew attention to their vocals, original music and warm stage demeanor. Her drive and vision has moved the band from a local band to a national musical sensation. Her music interest started as a child as she woke up every morning to the Arthur Smith show. He loved the classic country sounds of Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton. Her music interest took a back seat to her athletics as she went on to become an award winning basketball player at UNCW. It was not until her early 30’s that she learned to play the guitar and began writing music. As a successful songwriter, Sonya has penned and recorded more than 25 original songs for the band. In addition she has written sacred hymns, jingles, songs for an original outdoor drama, and wrote a musical comedy. She is a wife, mother of 3, entrepreneur, motivational speaker and athletic coach.

Crystal Richardson (banjo) is an award winning banjo player, songwriter and one of best vocal stylist in the business. Crystal grew up on the sounds of southern gospel music. Her family traveled to bluegrass and gospel shows on the weekends and her dad, Bobby Franklin (DJ and MC), introduced her to many of the legends in the business. As a kid she was inspired to play the banjo by Little Roy Lewis and has been burning up the banjo strings ever since the age of 9. At 15, she took a break from playing and focused more on her singing. She sang locally and even did a short stint in Nashville before she married and started a family. After being away from her banjo roots for more than 15 years she returned to the music scene in 2005 with a solo project comprising her original songs. For the next two years she toured with her band, Risynfast, and attended school to earn an Associate's Degree in Artist / Music Management where she graduated with honors. She contributed her vocals to the Daughters of American Bluegrass Vol. 1, which was nominated for Bluegrass Recorded Project of the Year. Crystal is married, mother of 2, and works with the Randolph County school system.

Sandy Whitley (bass) is one of the top female bass players in the country and a spirited singer. She grew up listening to bluegrass music and particularly loved the sound of the Osborne Brothers and Merle Haggard. Her dad is an excellent musician and taught his family of girls how to play and sing. Sandy was the oldest daughter so her dad suggested she play the bass, which is the backbone of any great band. She remembers when the upright bass was too tall for her to play so she stood on a box to play it. Sandy still plays her original Kay bass on stage. The Scott Family Band spent lots of time playing and singing at churches, funerals and local gatherings where she honed her musical skills. One of the most entertaining parts of any Pie show is Sandy relating some of her funny life stories, most people think are made up, however she will tell you that truth is stranger than fiction. Sandy is a wife, business owner, and mother of three.

Tori Jones (fiddle) is an extremely talented singer, songwriter and award winning fiddle player. She enjoys different styles of music from Celtic to classical to folk. Tori started playing at age 5 and hasn't stopped since. She grew up studying classical violin using the Suzuki method and after five years moved to bluegrass and has never looked back. Although Tori plays several instruments, including guitar and bass, this 19 years old primarily focuses her talents on learning and perfecting the art of fiddling. Like many musicians, she comes from a very musical family. As her two sisters learned to play instruments, they formed a family band and are still playing together. When not performing, through the mix of bluegrass, hymns, and classical pieces, she enjoys teaching young kids how to play the fiddle. Since graduating high school in 2016, Tori has pursued music full time and is currently working toward a degree in Music Studies from the Berklee College of Music.

Madeleine Baucom (mandolin) “The reason I play music...it feeds me!” It is evident the very first time you hear Madeleine Balcom sing that music does indeed feed her soul. Maddie is a highly accomplished musician and outstanding instrumentalist and rightly so because she comes from a very musical family. She is the youngest of five children and started playing banjo at age eight, progressed to guitar, bass and then on to mandolin. She has won numerous vocal and band competitions in the surrounding area of Monroe, North Carolina, where she and her family live. Maddie works as a personal assistant while teaching and writing music. In her free time she enjoys playing softball, and hanging out with her family and friends. Her musical influences are Alison Krauss and The Hatley Family. Although Maddie has played with several bands over the years, she has found a home with Sweet Potato Pie, where her versatility as an instrumentalist and vocalist deepens the bands musical capabilities. Maddie expresses her love of music with her favorite quote : “Where words fail, music speaks.”